

Presentation to House Study Committee on Childhood Lead Exposure

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About GEEARS

- GEEARS: Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students is a non-profit research, policy, and advocacy organization with a focus on children birth to five.
- Our work centers on early childhood education, healthy development, and family supports.
- GEEARS has brought information about the science of early childhood brain development to Georgia for over 10 years, including during a study committee on infant and toddler social-emotional development in 2019.

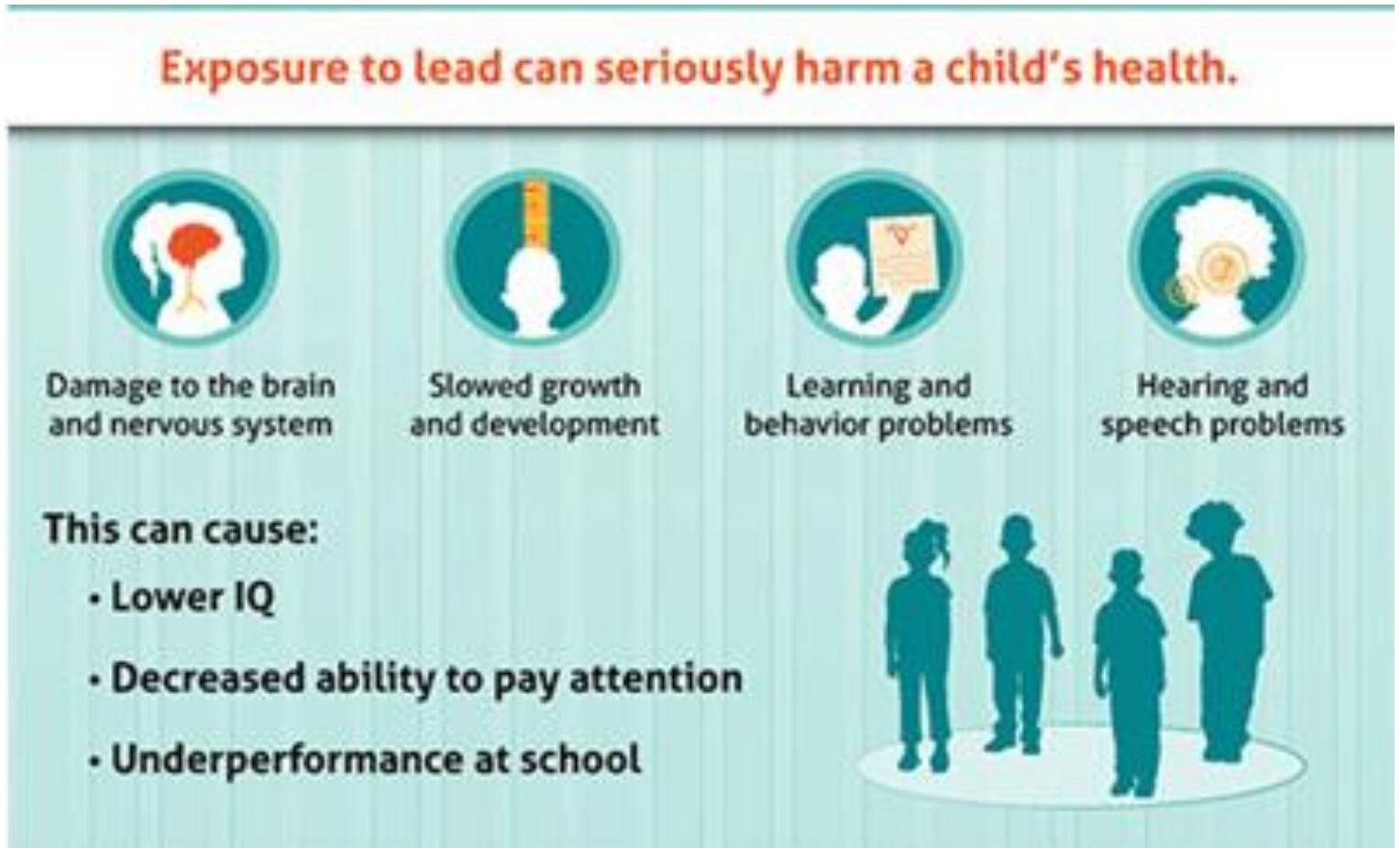


Early childhood brain development

- During the first three years of life, the brain develops at an extremely rapid pace, **forming more than one million new neural connections each second.**
- Healthy development in the early years provides the building blocks for educational achievement, economic productivity, responsible citizenship, lifelong health, strong communities, and successful parenting of the next generation.



Lead's effect on the developing brain



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

There is no safe level of lead. Prevention is the key.

Lead in Georgia

- The Georgia Department of Public Health reports that **one in 20 children** in the state has elevated lead levels. Children are at a higher risk for lead poisoning in 12 Georgia counties: **Bibb, Chatham, Cobb, DeKalb, Fulton, Glynn, Gwinnett, Hall, Richmond, Sumter, Thomas and Troup.** (Georgia Health News)
- **9.3%** of Georgia housing stock with lead risk (America's Health Ranking, United Health Foundation)



Lead in Atlanta's Westside

- Grandmother found lead in soil before starting a garden.
- Grandchildren were found to have elevated blood lead levels; later struggled with learning difficulties.
- Emory tested soil, EPA superfund site





Lead's cost

- It's estimated that preventing childhood lead poisoning nationwide would result in **\$84 billion** in potential future benefits, including nearly **\$18.5 billion** for the federal government and **\$9.6 billion** for states in the form of increased revenue and savings to the health care, education, and criminal legal systems. (10 Policies to Prevent and Respond to Childhood Lead Exposure, Pew Charitable Trusts)

Recommendations

Prevention:

- Educate Georgians on the effects of lead on pregnant women and children and how they might prevent lead exposure
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Screening & Surveillance:

Promote lead testing at regular intervals for young children and pregnant women

Reduce the blood lead level threshold for lead abatement activities from 10 micrograms/deciliter to 5 micrograms/deciliter to align with CDC recommendations

Remediation & Support:

Consider additional funding for lead abatement in homes, child care, and schools

Invest in high-quality early education and Head Start programs that provide wrap around services to young children, including help accessing health care
